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(54) **ENHANCED CAPACITIVE FINGERPRINT SENSING UNIT**

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CPC **G06K 9/0002** (2013.01); **G06K 9/00033** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
None
See application file for complete search history.

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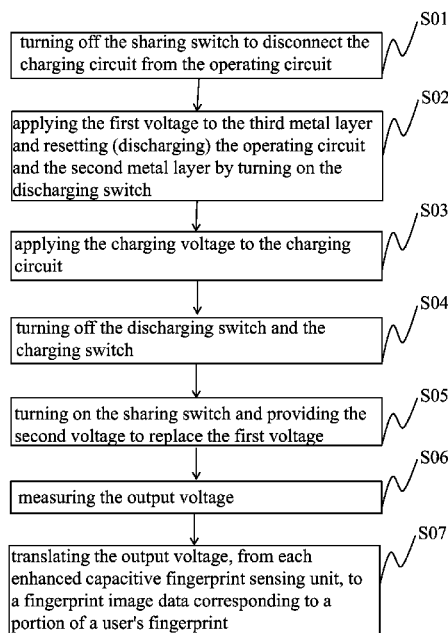
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit is disclosed. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit includes a base structure and a fingerprint sensing structure. The fingerprint sensing structure has a first inter-metal dielectric layer, a second metal layer, a second inter-metal dielectric layer, a third metal layer, and a passivation layer. By connecting the third metal layer to Transient Voltage Suppressor (TVS) device, anti-Electrostatic Discharge (ESD) is available. By increasing the thicknesses of the first inter-metal dielectric layer and the second inter-metal dielectric layer, sensitivity of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit can be improved.

9 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



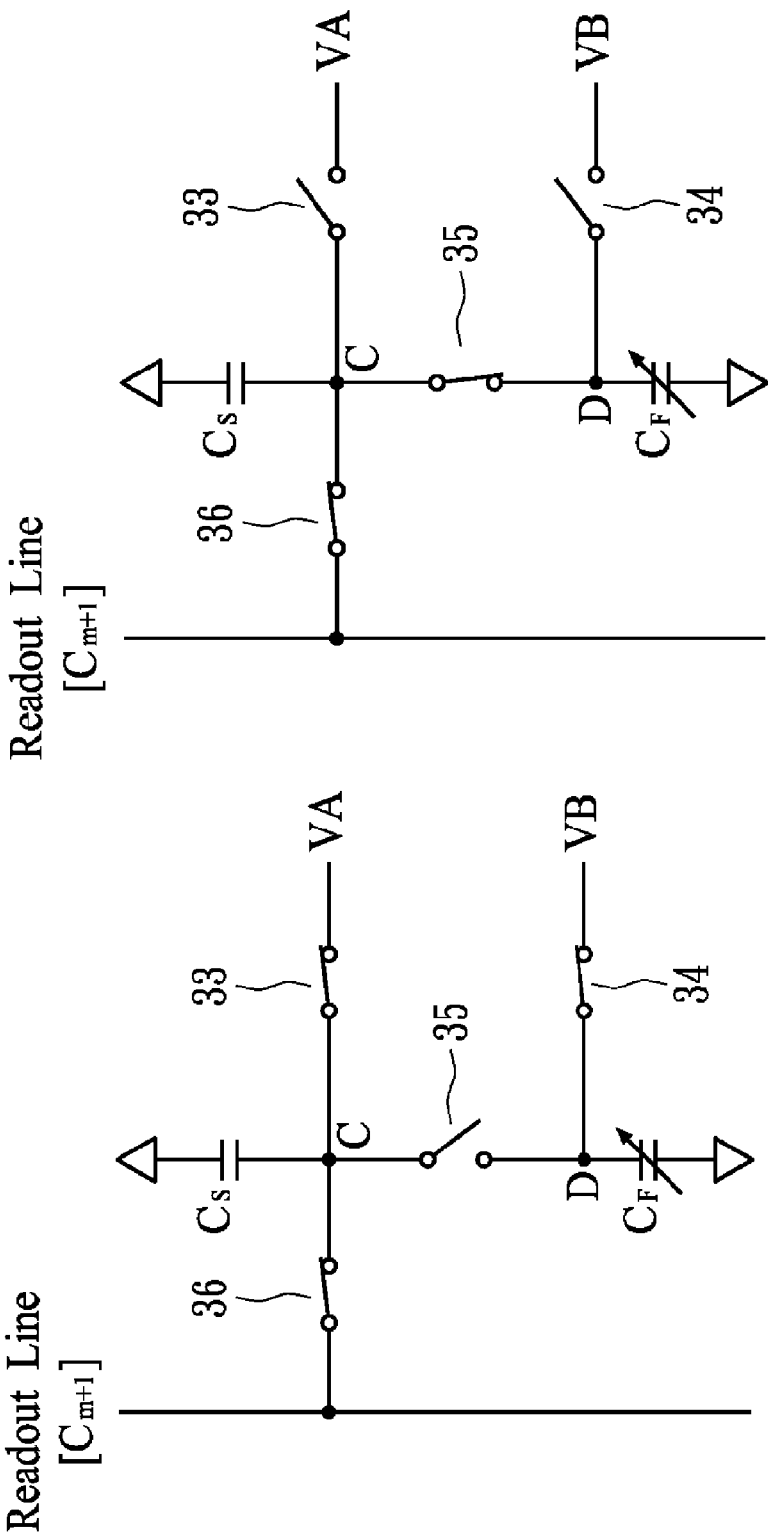


Fig. 1A (Prior Art)

Fig. 1B (Prior Art)

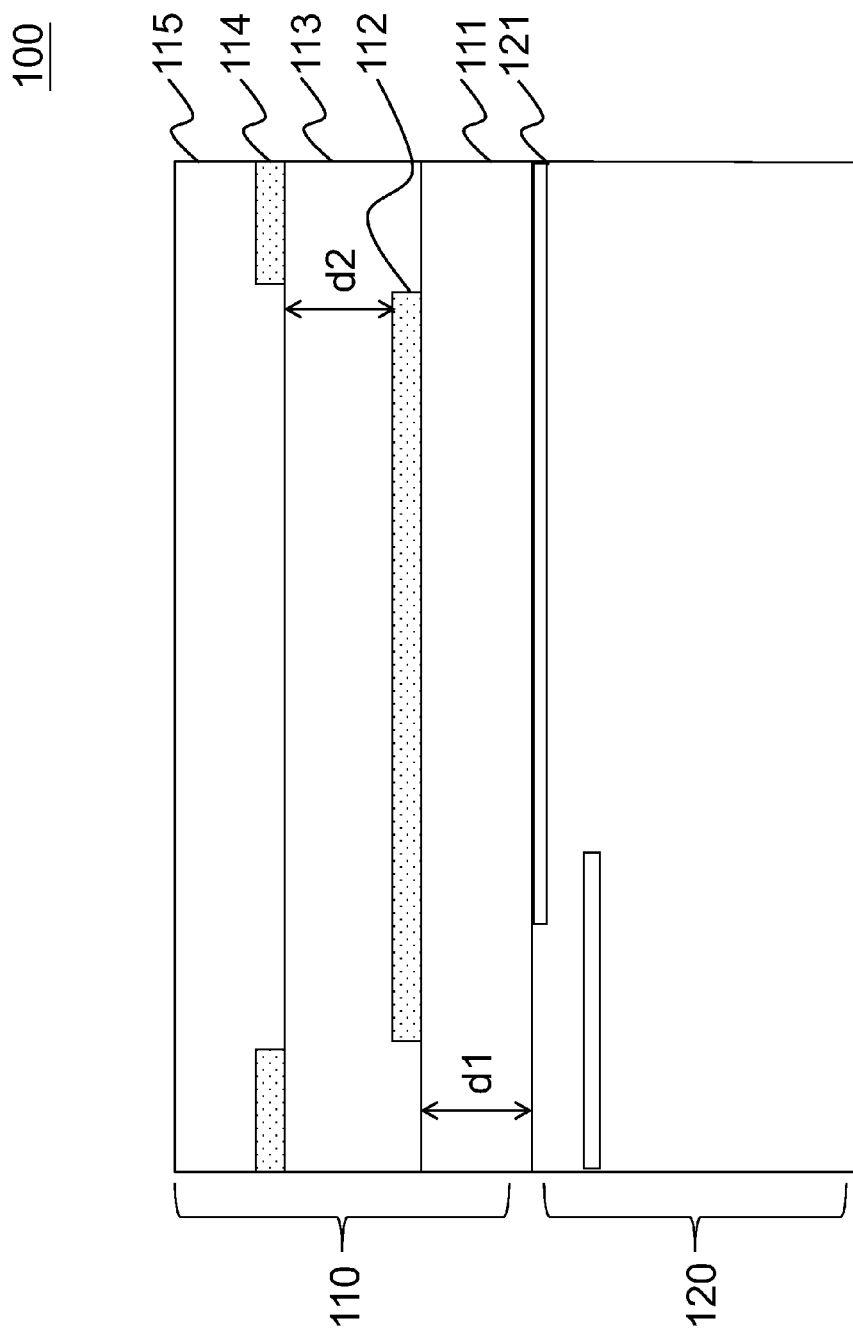


Fig. 2

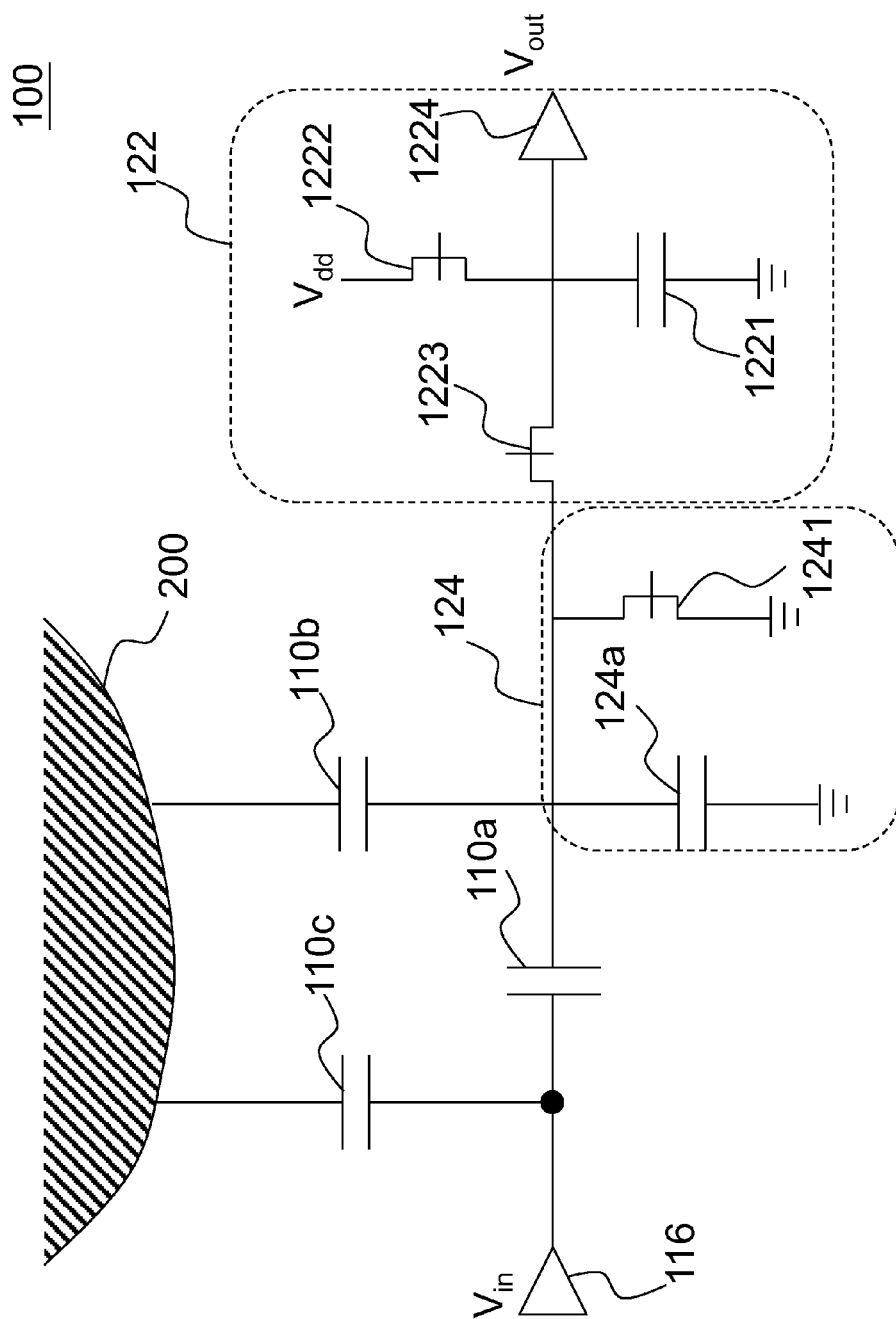


Fig. 3

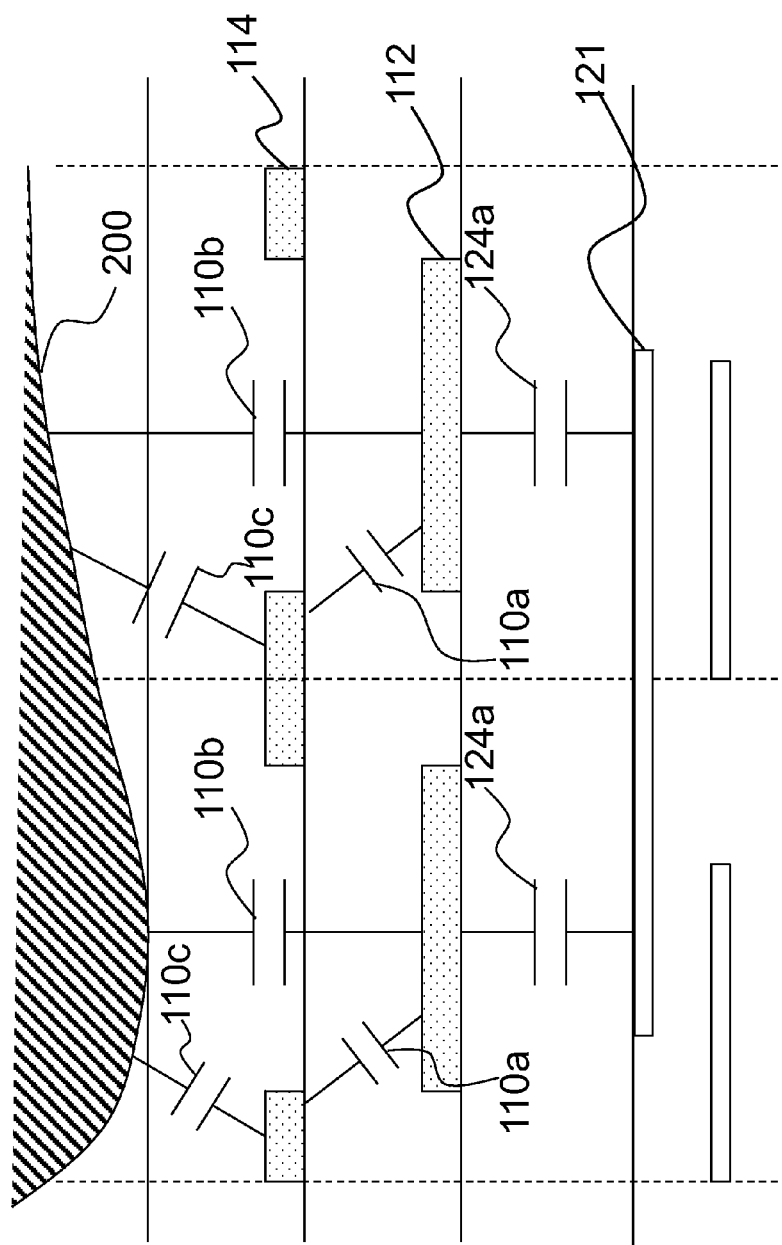


Fig. 4

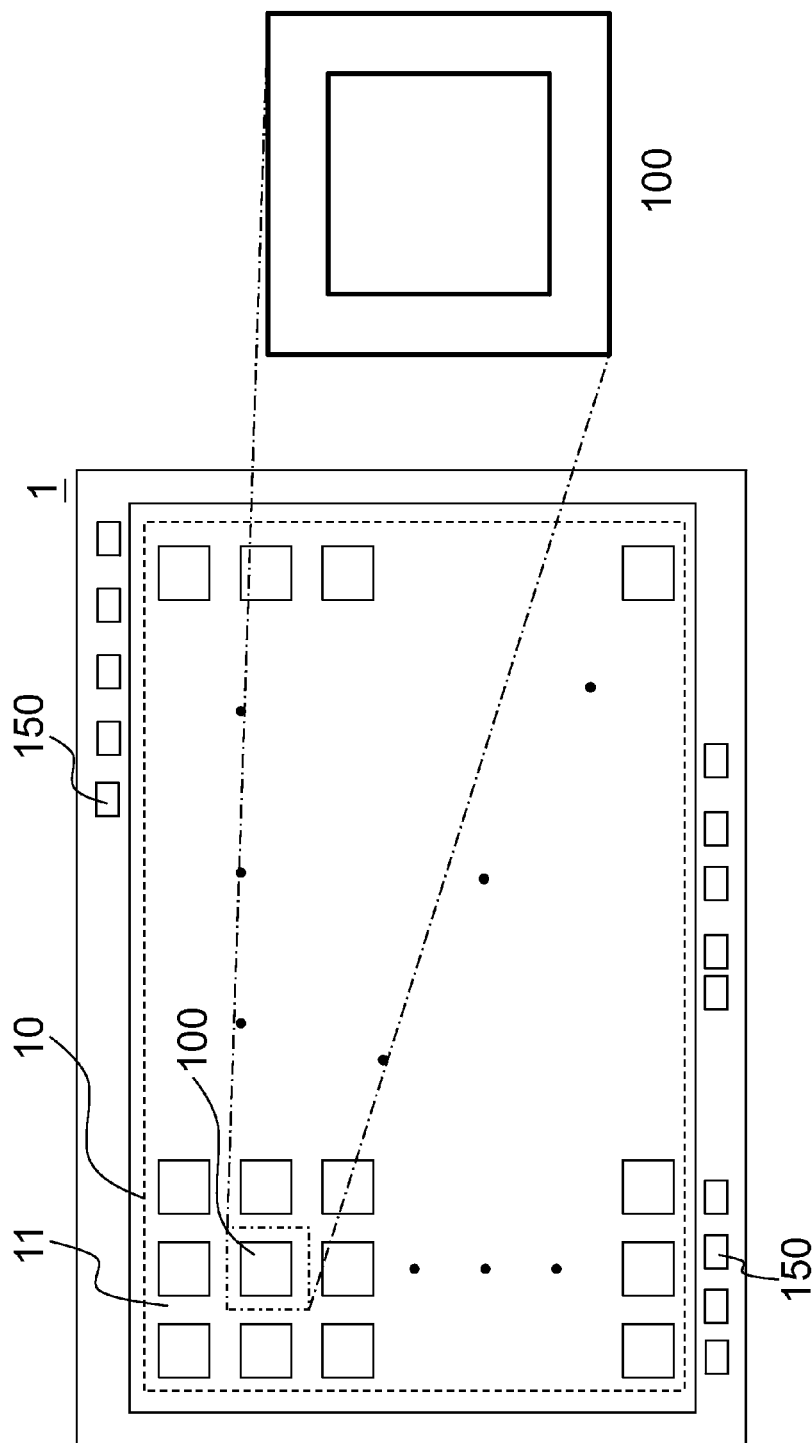


Fig. 5

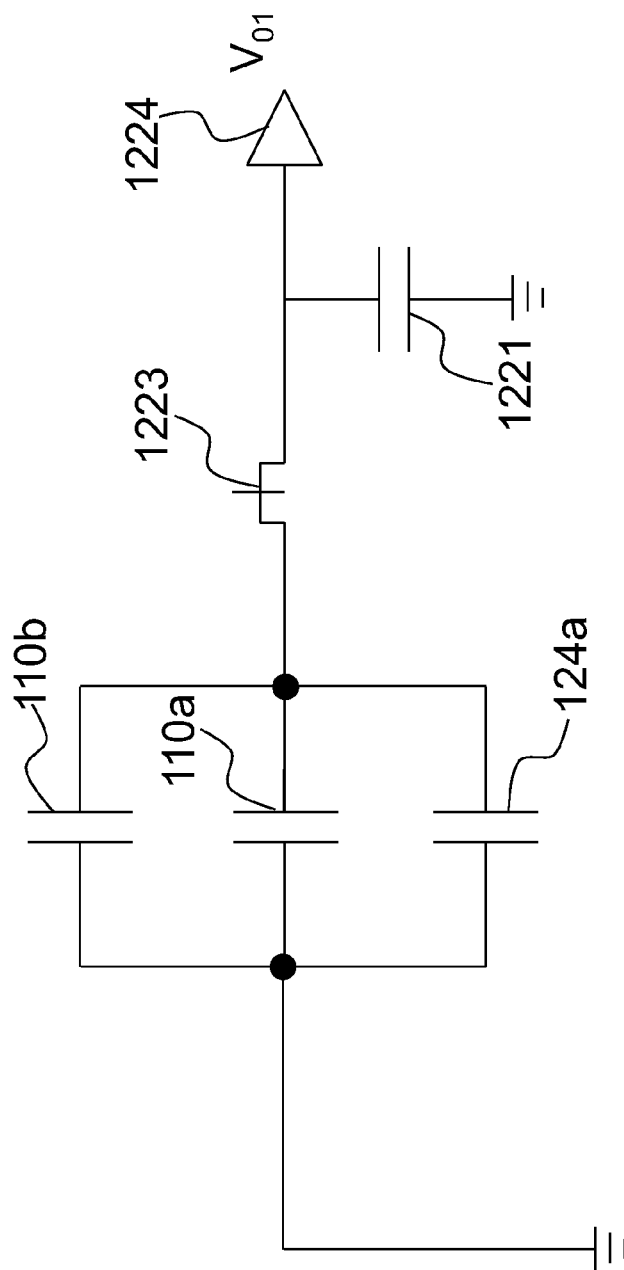


Fig. 6

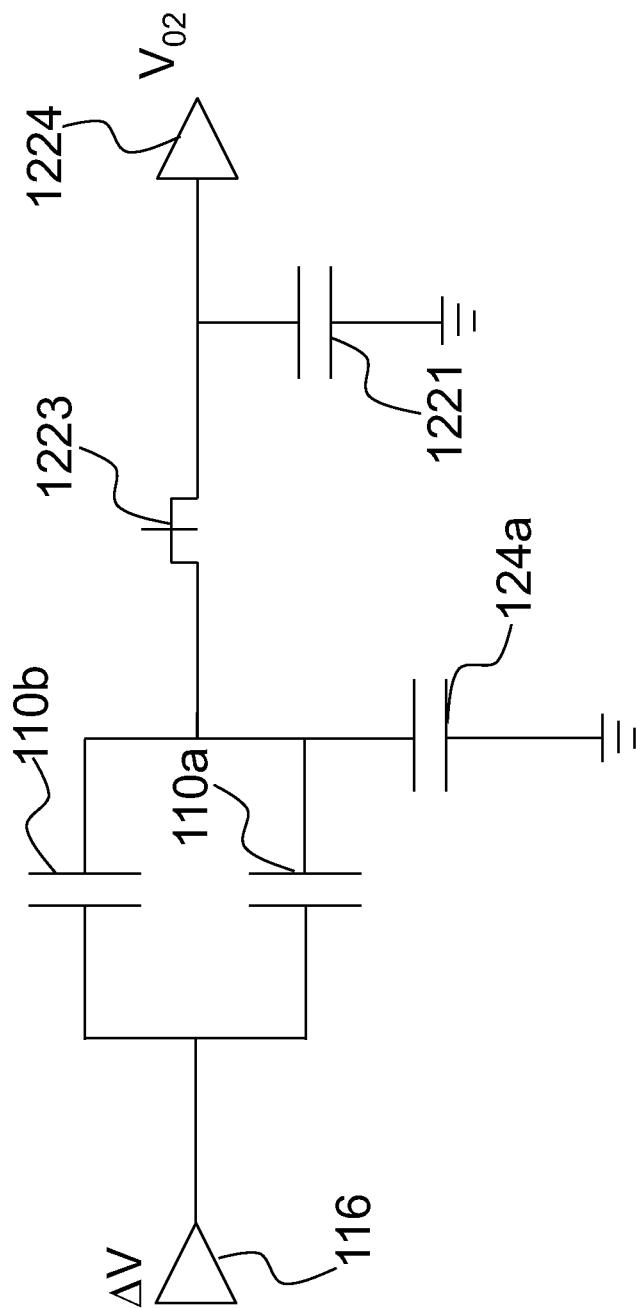


Fig. 7

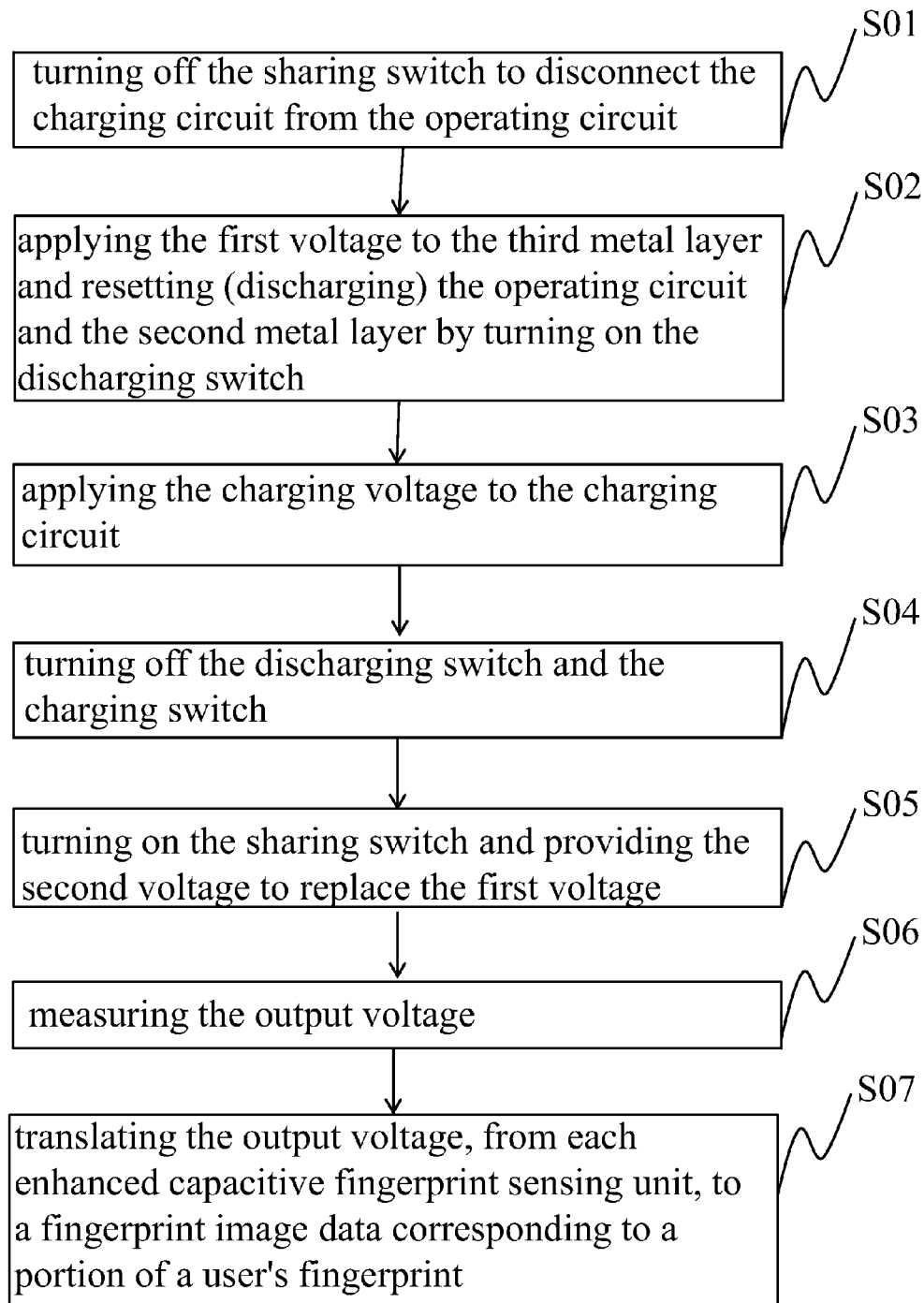


Fig. 8

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ENHANCED CAPACITIVE FINGERPRINT SENSING UNIT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a fingerprint sensing unit. More particularly, the present invention relates to an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are many human physiological characteristics which can be used to provide personnel identification for security purposes, such as fingerprint, retina, iris, DNA, or even face features. For all the devices that are capable of distinguishing some physiological characteristic of one person from others', a fingerprint reader has the lowest cost and complexity, while the identification results are generally pretty good. In addition, the size of data required to store the minutiae of one fingerprint is small (ranging from 120 bytes to 2K bytes). This makes fingerprint identification devices widely accepted in many fields.

There are also many types of sensing techniques for capturing fingerprint. The popular ones are optical type and capacitive type. Optical fingerprint sensing modules utilize reflected light intensity from the surface of a finger to tell where the ridges and valleys are on the contact portion of the finger. The advantage of the optical technique is reliability and low cost. However, due to the size of the embedded optical lens, the form factor of a optical fingerprint sensing module cannot be kept small. It is difficult for the optical type sensor to be embedded in portable devices. The capacitive type fingerprint identification modules, on the other hand, are made out of silicon chips and can be made very compact. In some cases, when a fingerprint image can be fetched by slide scanning, the fingerprint sensor can be even thin and slim, too. The small form factor of capacitive type fingerprint identification module makes it suitable for portable applications such as access control badges, bank cards, cellular phones, tablet computers, USB dongles, etc.

Capacitive fingerprint sensor is based on the physics principle that the capacitance of a two parallel metal plates capacitor is inversely proportional to the distance between two plates. A capacitive fingerprint sensor consists of an array of sensing units. Each sensing unit contains a sensing plate. By using the sensing plate as one plate of the two-plated capacitor and a dermal tissue as another plate, ridges and valleys of a finger can be located by measuring the different capacitances. There are many prior arts related to the capacitive type fingerprint identification module. For example, the U.S. Pat. No. 6,114,862 discloses a distance sensor. It has a capacitive element in turn having a first capacitor plate which is positioned facing a second capacitor plate whose distance is to be measured. In the case of fingerprinting, the second capacitor plate is defined directly by the skin surface of the finger being printed. The sensor includes an inverting amplifier, between the input and output of which the capacitive element is connected to form a negative feedback branch. By supplying an electric charge step to the input of the inverting amplifier, a voltage step directly proportional to the distance being measured is obtained at the output. Although a structure of the sensor is simple, the amplifiers suffer uniformity problem and their energy efficiency is not good.

Another prior art is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 7,663,380. Please refer to FIG. 1A and FIG. 1B. A capacitive fingerprint sensor comprises a fingerprint capacitor C_F , a reference

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capacitor C_S , a first transistor **33**, a second transistor **34**, a third transistor **35** and a fourth transistor **36**. The fingerprint capacitor C_F has a capacitance that is either a valley capacitance C_{FV} or a ridge capacitance C_{FR} . The reference capacitor C_S has a capacitance C_S , and $C_{FV} < C_S < C_{FR}$. The first transistor **33** is configured to pre-charge the reference capacitor C_S . The second transistor **34** is configured to pre-charge the fingerprint capacitor C_F . The third transistor **35** is configured to re-distribute the charges of the reference capacitor C_S and fingerprint capacitor C_F . The fourth transistor **36** is configured to output the voltage of the reference capacitor C_S after redistribution.

FIG. 1A further tells the equivalent circuit of the fingerprint sensor in the pre-charge phase. In the pre-charge phase for the fingerprint sensor, the readout select line C_m (not shown) is asserted, the first transistor **33** and the second transistor **34** are enabled, and the voltages V_A and V_B pre-charge the reference capacitor C_S and fingerprint capacitor C_F , respectively. FIG. 1B shows the same circuit in the evaluation phase. In the evaluation phase for the fingerprint sensor, a readout select line C_{m+1} is asserted, the third transistor **35** is enabled, and the electrical charges stored in the reference capacitor C_S and fingerprint capacitor C_F are redistributed. At this moment, a scan line is still asserted, the fourth transistor **36** is enabled, and the readout line outputs voltage depending on which portion of the human fingerprint, i.e., ridge or valley is detected. Apparently, the outputs voltage of the readout select line is larger if the ridge is detected, or smaller if the valley is detected. Thus, a fingerprint can be mapped based on the outputted voltages, varied with portions of the finger.

However, in practice, sensitivity of fingerprint sensing devices made by such capacitive fingerprint sensors is not high. When there is a protective layer on the top of the distance sensor, or the distance sensor is packaged in a molding compound, quality of fetched images gets worse.

Therefore, in order to resolve the problems mentioned above, an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit is desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This paragraph extracts and compiles some features of the present invention; other features will be disclosed in the follow-up paragraphs. It is intended to cover various modifications and similar arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

In order to settle the problems mentioned above, an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit is disclosed. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit includes: a base structure, having at least one first metal layer and forming a charging circuit and an operating circuit, for alternatively receiving a charging voltage and sharing electric charges from the charging circuit to a capacitance of the operating circuit while stopping receiving the charging voltage, and a fingerprint sensing structure, formed above the base structure, including: a first inter-metal dielectric layer, having a first depth greater than 3 μm ; a second metal layer, formed above the first inter-metal dielectric layer and forming a sensing metal plate; a second inter-metal dielectric layer, formed above and around the second metal layer, covering the sensing metal plate and having a second depth greater than 3 μm ; a third metal layer, formed above the second inter-metal dielectric layer, forming a rectangle cell with an opening located above the sensing metal plate and connecting to a Transient Voltage Suppressor (TVS) device, for receiving a first voltage and a second voltage; and a

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passivation layer, covering the third metal layer. A threshold voltage to trigger the TVS device is higher than the first voltage and/or the second voltage. The base structure also shares electric charges from the charging circuit to capacitances of the fingerprint sensing structure while the charging circuit stops receiving the charging voltage.

According to the present invention, a charging capacitor is built in the charging circuit for storing electric charges when the charging voltage is received and a parasitic capacitance exists in the operating circuit, and a cross capacitance is formed between the third metal layer and the sensing metal plate. When a finger approaches the passivation layer, a signal capacitance is formed between the finger and the third metal layer and a finger capacitance is formed between the finger and the sensing metal plate. A sharing switch is formed between the operating circuit and the charging circuit, for switching operations of receiving a charging voltage and that of sharing electric charges. A voltage variation is obtained in the charging circuit when the second voltage takes place and the charging voltage stops being applied and the sharing switch turns on.

When V_{out} is a value of the output voltage, V_{dd} is a value of the charging voltage, V_1 and V_2 are values of the first and of the second voltage, respectively, C_r is a capacitance value of the charging capacitor, C_p is a value of the parasitic capacitance, C_f is a value of the finger capacitance, and C_x is a value of the cross capacitance, the output voltage is obtained as

$$V_{out} = \frac{C_r}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} V_{dd} + \frac{C_f + C_x}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} (V_2 - V_1)$$

Preferably, a discharging switch is formed in the operating circuit, for resetting the voltage of the operating circuit and that of the second metal layer to signal ground when the sharing switch is off.

A method to acquiring a fingerprint using the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units, includes the steps of: turning off the sharing switch to disconnect the charging circuit from the operating circuit; applying the first voltage to the third metal layer and resetting the operating circuit and the second metal layer by turning on the discharging switch; applying the charging voltage to the charging circuit; turning off the discharging switch and the charging switch; turning on the sharing switch and providing the second voltage to replace the first voltage; measuring the output voltage; and translating the output voltage, from each enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit, to a fingerprint image data corresponding to a portion of a user's fingerprint.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a fingerprint sensor includes a number of enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units to form a fingerprint sensing array, wherein the same structure of the base structures or the fingerprint sensing structures are adjacent to each other at the same level and the third metal layers of all fingerprint sensing units are connected so that a metal grid is formed.

By connecting the third metal layer to the TVS device, the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units are protected from ESD (Electrostatic Discharge) damage. By increasing the thicknesses of the first inter-metal dielectric layer and the second inter-metal dielectric layer, the parasitic capacitance C_p and the cross capacitance C_x are reduced. According to

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the V_{out} formula mentioned above, the sensitivity of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit is improved.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A and FIG. 1B show a conventional fingerprint sensor.

FIG. 2 shows a schematic diagram of an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is an equivalent circuit of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit.

FIG. 4 illustrates the physical structure of two adjacent enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit with a finger put on it and the capacitances formed therein.

FIG. 5 is a top view of an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensor.

FIG. 6 shows an equivalent circuit for the charge sharing term of the output voltage.

FIG. 7 shows an equivalent circuit for the second voltage term of the output voltage.

FIG. 8 is a flow chart for operating the equivalent circuit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The present invention will now be described more specifically with reference to the following embodiment.

Please see FIG. 2 to FIG. 8. An embodiment according to the present invention is described. FIG. 2 shows a cross-sectional view of an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100 according to the present invention. FIG. 3 is an equivalent circuit of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100. FIG. 4 illustrates the fingerprint sensing structure 110 and the corresponding equivalent capacitors located therein by showing two adjacent enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100. FIG. 5 is a top view of an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensor. FIG. 6 shows an equivalent circuit for the charge sharing term of the output voltage while FIG. 7 shows an equivalent circuit for the second voltage term of the output voltage. FIG. 8 is a flow chart for operating the equivalent circuit.

The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100 basically includes a fingerprint sensing structure 110 and a base structure 120. The fingerprint sensing structure 110 is formed above the base structure 120. The fingerprint sensing structure 110 has several substructures. They are a first inter-metal dielectric layer 111, a second metal layer 112, a second inter-metal dielectric layer 113, a third metal layer 114, and a passivation layer 115. The first inter-metal dielectric layer 111 can be made from common processes for manufacturing any inter-metal dielectric layer in an integrated circuit. Different from conventional sensing units for a fingerprint sensor, the depth of the first inter-metal dielectric layer 111 should be thick enough. The reason that it needs a thicker depth will be discussed later. As shown in FIG. 2, a first depth d1 of the first inter-metal dielectric layer 111 between adjacent metal layers is indicated. The first depth d1 should be greater than 3 μm , e.g. 5 μm .

The second metal layer 112 is formed above the first inter-metal dielectric layer 111 to work as a sensing metal plate. The second metal layer 112 forms several capacitances (capacitors, tangible or intangible) with adjacent objects. For example, as shown in FIG. 4, the second metal layer 112 and a finger 200 form a finger capacitance 110b when the finger 200 comes close to the fingerprint sensing unit 100. Namely, the second metal layer 112 and the finger 200 are compo-

nents of a capacitor and whose capacitance value varies as the distance between a close-in portion of the finger **200** and the second metal layer **112** changes. Generally, the capacitance value is reversely proportional to the distance.

The second inter-metal dielectric layer **113** is formed above and around the second metal layer **112**. It covers the sensing metal plate (the second metal layer **112**). In order to minimize the capacitance between the third metal layer **114** and the second metal layer **112** (reasons of this will be illustrated below), a second depth **d2** of the second inter-metal dielectric layer **113** between adjacent metal layers should be larger than what is conventionally implemented. The second depth **d2** should be greater than 3 μm , e.g. 5 μm .

The third metal layer **114** is formed above the second inter-metal dielectric layer **113**. The third metal layer **114** forms a rectangle cell with an opening located above the sensing metal plate **112**. Meanwhile, it connects to a Transient Voltage Suppressor (TVS) device (not shown). The TVS device is an electronic component used to protect other sensitive electronic devices from voltage spikes induced on connected wires. The TVS device may not be necessary to be manufactured along with the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100** or a fingerprint sensor composed of a fingerprint sensing array of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units **100**. The TVS device can be a standalone element, linked to the third metal layer **114** of every enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units **100**. Another function of the third metal layer **114** is to receive a first voltage and a second voltage (V_{in} shown in FIG. 3). The only limitation is that a threshold voltage to trigger the TVS device should be higher than that of the first voltage and/or the second voltage. (In present embodiment, the second voltage comes after the first voltage and it forms a voltage drop). Otherwise, any voltage higher than the threshold voltage will be released to avoid damaging the circuit in the base structure. Thus, the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100** doesn't have to include an extra metal layer to provide ESD protection. The topmost layer is a passivation layer **115**. It covers the third metal layer **114** and protects the layers below from impact and scratch. The voltage change created by the first and the second voltage can be provided by an input buffer **116**.

The base structure **120** has at least one first metal layer **121**. The at least first metal layer **121** provides interconnection of the circuit elements such as the capacitors and switches in the base structure. With the at least one first metal layer **121**, the base structure **120** forms a charging circuit **122** and an operating circuit **124**. The charging circuit **122** and the operating circuit **124** are illustrated by dashed frames in the equivalent circuit in FIG. 3. Main goals of the base structure **120** are alternatively receiving a stable charging voltage (V_{dd}), and sharing electric charges from the charging circuit **122** to the capacitances of the operating circuit **124** and fingerprint sensing structure **110** while stopping receiving the charging voltage.

The charging circuit **122** has a charging capacitor **1221** built inside. The charging capacitor **1221** is used to store electric charges when the charging voltage is applied. One side of the charging capacitor **1221** is connected to the signal ground. Therefore, the charging capacitor **1221** will be charged to the stable voltage V_{dd} during the charging stage (S03). The charging capacitor **1221** may be implemented by circuit elements such as MOS or Poly-to-Poly capacitor. The capacitance of the charging capacitor **1221** is determined by the geometry of the MOS gate or Poly silicon. Meanwhile, the other equivalent capacitance C_x , C_p and C_f which will be introduced later naturally exist when the enhanced capaci-

tive fingerprint sensing unit **100** is formed or when the finger **200** comes close to the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100**.

The charging circuit **122** also has two switches, a charging switch **1222** and a sharing switch **1223**. When the charging switch **1222** is turned on while the sharing switch **1223** is turned off, the charging voltage will be applied to the charging circuit **122** and the charging capacitor **1221**(C_p) is charged to the charging voltage V_{dd} . When the charging switch **1222** is turned off while the sharing switch **1223** remains off, the charging voltage supply stops, and the charging capacitor **1221**(C_p) retains the charging voltage V_{dd} . The sharing switch **1223** is formed between the operating circuit **124** and the charging circuit **122**. It switches operations of receiving a charging voltage (as mentioned above, when the charging switch **1222** is turned on) and sharing electric charge. Namely, when the sharing switch **1223** is turned off, the charging circuit **122** and the operating circuit **124** are isolated from each other. On the other hand, when the sharing switch **1223** is turned on, the charging circuit **122** and the operating circuit **124** are connected to each other and electric charges can move there between, so that a new balanced distribution of electric charges is achieved.

The charging circuit **122** further includes a buffer **1224**. The buffer **1224** is used to isolate the sensing unit **100** from other processing circuits (not shown) and to deliver output voltage V_{out} to the subsequent processing circuit (not shown). Usually, the buffer **1224** is made of "voltage follower".

The operating circuit **124** is a general term for the elements in the base structure **120** but not belong to the charging circuit **122**. In other words, any element in the base structure **120** separated from the charging circuit **122** by the sharing switch **1223** is a part of the operating circuit **124**. Functions of the operating circuit **124** will be illustrated later with the operation of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100**. The operating circuit **124** has a discharging switch **1241**. The discharging switch **1241** is used for resetting (discharging) the voltage of the operating circuit **124** and that of the second metal layer **112** to signal ground when the sharing switch **1223** is off. As mentioned above, several capacitances naturally exist. In order to have a better understanding of the operation of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100**, all these capacitances are embodied by equivalent capacitors. A parasitic capacitance exists in the operating circuit **124** (actually, the parasitic capacitance is formed between the sensing metal plate **112** and the at least one first metal layer **121**), and a cross capacitance is formed between the third metal layer **114** and the sensing metal plate **112**. Therefore, a parasitic capacitor **124a** and a cross capacitor **110a** are used for illustration, respectively.

When the finger **200** approaches the passivation layer **115**, a signal capacitance is formed between the finger **200** and the third metal layer **114**. Meanwhile, a finger capacitance is formed between the finger **200** and the sensing metal plate **112**. Similarly, a signal capacitor **110c** and a finger capacitor **110b** are used for illustration, respectively. FIG. 4 illustrates the fingerprint sensing structure **110** and each of the equivalent capacitors located therein by showing two adjacent enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100** (separated by dashed lines).

It should be emphasized that a fingerprint sensing array **10** (or fingerprint sensing area), which is enclosed by a dashed frame in FIG. 5, is formed by arranging the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units **100** in an array with the

same structure adjacent to each other at the same level, and the third metal layers **114** of all enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units **100** are connected. Hence, a metal grid **11** is formed. Considering that the total area of the connected third metal layer **114** is much larger than the individual sensing plate (the second metal layer **112**), the capacitance of the signal capacitor **110c** is much larger than that of other equivalent capacitors in the fingerprint sensing structure, i.e. $C_s \gg C_x, C_p$ or C_f . Thus, the signal capacitor **110c** can be considered as short circuit and can be ignored in the subsequent discussion. Please see FIG. 5. FIG. 5 is a top view of an enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensor **1**. The present invention can be applied to the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensor **1** which is composed of the fingerprint sensing array **10** mentioned above and a number of Input/output (I/O) pads **150**. The I/O pads **150** are linked to the fingerprint sensing array **10** for connecting with external circuitry.

The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100** works with the following procedure which consists of distinct and repeated stages. Please refer to FIG. 8. There are three main stages: a setup stage, a charging stage, and a sharing stage. At the setup stage, the sharing switch **1223** is turned off (S01) so that the charging circuit **122** and the operating circuit **124** are disconnected.

In the charging stage, first, the first voltage V_1 is applied to the third metal layer **114**, and the operating circuit **124** and the second metal layer **112** are discharged to signal ground (resetting) by turning on the discharging switch **1241** (S02). Then, the charging voltage is applied to the charging circuit **122** by turning on the charging switch **1222** (S03). In the last step of the charging stage, the discharging switch **1241** and the charging switch **1222** are turned off (S04). It should be noticed that the sequence of S02 and S03 may be swapped, or the two steps may occur at the same time. At the end of the charging stage, the charging capacitor **1221** is charged to the charging voltage V_{dd} , while the equivalent capacitors are charged to the first voltage V_1 .

Following the charging stage is the sharing stage. During the sharing stage, the following operations occur substantially at the same time: turning on the sharing switch **1223** and providing the second voltage to replace the first voltage (S05). In fact, one may occur a little earlier. The order doesn't affect the result. When the voltage at the buffer **1224** is stable, the output voltage V_{out} is measured. It should be noticed that when the second voltage takes place, a voltage variation is obtained in the charging circuit **122**. It is obvious that the distribution of electric charges in the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100** will change, further influencing the output voltage V_{out} . Actually, the influence of the output voltage comes from two sources, the sharing of electric charges and the voltage change from the input buffer **116** (difference between the second voltage and the first voltage). V_{out} can be a sum of voltage values contributed from the two sources. It will be illustrated below.

To illustrate the sharing stage more clearly, an equivalent circuit is depicted in FIG. 3. V_{dd} is a value of the charging voltage, V_1 and V_2 are values of the first and of the second voltage, respectively, C_r is a capacitance value of the charging capacitor, C_p is a value of the parasitic capacitance, C_f is a value of the finger capacitance, and C_x is a value of the cross capacitance, the output voltage V_{out} is the voltage across C_r , measured by the output buffer **1224**.

$$V_{out} = \frac{C_r}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} V_{dd} + \frac{C_f + C_x}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} (V_2 - V_1).$$

By the theory of linear circuit, the net effect of the charge sharing through the sharing switch **1223** and the driving voltage change from V_1 to V_2 is the sum of the voltages of which charge sharing through the sharing switch **1223** and the driving voltage change from V_1 to V_2 are applied separately.

An equivalent circuit of the charge sharing through the sharing switch (without the voltage change from V_1 to V_2) is depicted in FIG. 6. An equivalent circuit of the voltage drop from V_1 to V_2 on input buffer (without C_r being charged to V_{dd}) is depicted in FIG. 7. Let V_{01} represents the voltage change of V_{out} when the sharing switch is turned on at the sharing stage, but the input driver remains at the same voltage V_1 , and V_{02} represents the voltage change of V_{out} when the input buffer changes from V_1 to V_2 while charging capacitor is not charged to V_{dd} . The net result of V_{out} will be:

$$V_{out} = V_{01} + V_{02}$$

where

$$V_{01} = \frac{C_r}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} V_{dd}$$

and

$$V_{02} = \frac{C_f + C_x}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} (V_2 - V_1)$$

For the naturally formed capacitance C_p and C_x , their values are determined according to the physical structure and material of the enhance capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100**. The variable finger capacitance C_f is determined by the distance of from the second metal layer **112** to the valley or ridge portion of the fingertip that touches the sensor. The charging capacitance C_r is formed by a circuit component inside the at least one first metal layer **121** which can be determined by the geometry of the circuit element (such as MOS transistor or Poly-to-Poly capacitor) which implements charging capacitance C_r . In order to justify our structure design of the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit **100**, the first derivative of V_{out} with respect to C_f should be given. Therefore, we have:

$$\frac{dV_{out}}{dC_f} = \frac{dV_{01}}{dC_f} + \frac{dV_{02}}{dC_f} = -V_{dd} \cdot \frac{C_r}{(C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r)^2} + (V_2 - V_1) \cdot \frac{C_p + C_r}{(C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r)^2}$$

wherein

$$\frac{dV_{01}}{dC_f} = -V_{dd} \cdot \frac{C_r}{(C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r)^2}$$

and

$$\frac{dV_{02}}{dC_f} = \frac{d}{dC_f} (V_2 - V_1) \cdot \left(1 - \frac{C_p + C_r}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} \right) =$$

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-continued

$$(V_2 - V_1) \cdot \frac{C_p + C_r}{(C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r)^2}.$$

In order to improve the sensitivity, which can be represented as

$$\left| \frac{dV_{out}}{dC_f} \right|,$$

the first term

$$\frac{dV_{01}}{dC_f}$$

and the second term

$$\frac{dV_{02}}{dC_f}$$

must have the same sign; in other words, if V_{dd} is a positive value, then $V_2 - V_1$ must be negative, which means $V_1 > V_2$. Also it is obvious that the values of C_p and C_x are preferred to be reduced so that the sensitivity,

$$\left| \frac{dV_{out}}{dC_f} \right|,$$

can be increased. To achieve this goal, the depth of the first IMD (inter-metal dielectric) layer 111 and second IMD layer 113 needs to be increased since the capacitance is reversely proportional to the distance between two conductive plates. By experiments, the first depth d1 and the second depth d2 should be greater than 3 μm . Since thickness of IMD in standard CMOS process is below 1 μm , this requirement may take special deposition process during manufacturing.

At the end of the sharing stage, when the distribution of electric charges reaches an equilibrium, the output voltage may be measured (S06). Since position of ridge and valley area of a finger above one enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100 is reflected by the given output voltage, finally, translate the output voltage, sequentially from each enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100, to a fingerprint image data corresponding to a portion of a user's fingerprint (S07).

It should be noticed that the voltages described above are relative voltages at different circuit nodes. If the value of the charging voltage V_{dd} is positive, resetting process of the second metal layer 112 is to discharge to 0V or the signal ground. In this case, the second voltage after the first voltage forms a negative going step, and the voltage change from V_1 to V_2 is a voltage drop. It may be possible for the value of the charging voltage to be 0V. Under this condition, the resetting process of the second metal layer 112 is to charge to a positive value of voltage. In this case, the second voltage after the first voltage forms a positive going step, and the voltage change from V_1 to V_2 is a voltage rise. The 0V charging voltage with voltage positive input voltage change mentioned above is an alternative for operating the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit 100.

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While the invention has been described in terms of what is presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiment, it is to be understood that the invention needs not be limited to the disclosed embodiment. On the contrary, it is intended to cover various modifications and similar arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims, which are to be accorded with the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all such modifications and similar structures.

What is claimed is:

1. An enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit, comprising:

a base structure, having at least one first metal layer and forming a charging circuit and an operating circuit, for alternatively receiving a charging voltage and sharing electric charges from the charging circuit to a capacitance of the operating circuit while stopping receiving the charging voltage, and

a fingerprint sensing structure, formed above the base structure, comprising:

a first inter-metal dielectric layer, having a first depth greater than 3 μm ;

a second metal layer, formed above the first inter-metal dielectric layer and forming a sensing metal plate;

a second inter-metal dielectric layer, formed above and around the second metal layer, covering the sensing metal plate and having a second depth greater than 3 μm ;

a third metal layer, formed above the second inter-metal dielectric layer, forming a rectangle cell with an opening located above the sensing metal plate and connecting to a Transient Voltage Suppressor (TVS) device, for receiving a first voltage and a second voltage; and

a passivation layer, covering the third metal layer,

wherein a threshold voltage to trigger the TVS device is higher than the first voltage and/or the second voltage; the base structure shares electric charges from the charging circuit to capacitances of the fingerprint sensing structure while stops receiving the charging voltage.

2. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 1, wherein a charging capacitor is built in the charging circuit for storing electric charges when the charging voltage is received and a parasitic capacitance exists in the operating circuit, and a cross capacitance is formed between the third metal layer and the sensing metal plate.

3. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 2, wherein when a finger approaches the passivation layer, a signal capacitance is formed between the finger and the third metal layer and a finger capacitance is formed between the finger and the sensing metal plate.

4. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 3, wherein a voltage variation is obtained in the charging circuit when the second voltage takes place, the charging voltage stops being applied and the sharing switch turns on.

5. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 4, wherein the output voltage is

$$V_{out} = \frac{C_r}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} V_{dd} + \frac{C_f + C_x}{C_p + C_x + C_f + C_r} (V_2 - V_1)$$

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wherein V_{out} is a value of the output voltage, V_{dd} is a value of the charging voltage, V_1 and V_2 are values of the first and of the second voltage, respectively, C_r is a capacitance value of the charging capacitor, C_p is a value of the parasitic capacitance, C_f is a value of the finger capacitance, and C_x is a value of the cross capacitance.

6. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 5, wherein a discharging switch is formed in the operating circuit, for resetting the voltage of the operating circuit and that of the second metal layer to signal ground when the sharing switch is off.

7. A method to acquiring a fingerprint using the enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 6, comprising the steps of:

turning off the sharing switch to disconnect the charging circuit from the operating circuit;

applying the first voltage to the third metal layer and resetting the operating circuit and the second metal layer by turning on the discharging switch;

applying the charging voltage to the charging circuit;

turning off the discharging switch and the charging switch;

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turning on the sharing switch and providing the second voltage to replace the first voltage;

measuring the output voltage; and

translating the output voltage, from each enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit, to a fingerprint image data corresponding to a portion of a user's fingerprint.

8. The enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing unit according to claim 1, wherein a sharing switch is formed between the operating circuit and the charging circuit, for switching operations of receiving the charging voltage and sharing electric charges.

9. A fingerprint sensor, comprising:

a plurality of enhanced capacitive fingerprint sensing units according to claim 1 to form a fingerprint sensing array, wherein the same structure of the base structures or the fingerprint sensing structures are adjacent to each other at the same level and the third metal layers of all fingerprint sensing units are connected so that a metal grid is formed.

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